



*I'll Wait
for
You*

by
Alessa

I'll Wait For You

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She just sits there, playing her guitar with her eyes closed and a sweet smile on her soft lips. She makes it so hard to stay angry at her because I really love her with all my heart. But I have to go. She's my best friend, and I don't want to go. But I *have* to go.

Daddy has a new job, and we have to move to another country. A big city too, instead of this old bum town where we are now, sitting on a street corner and listening to my best friend Deryn play her guitar for some loose change so we could buy ice cream at the local corner store.

There's just no way I can change this. I simply have to go with my family because thirteen-year-olds are not allowed to live alone, they say. It sucks so much, and I've told her and told her, but she just doesn't get it. Oh, she gets it that I'm going to be away for quite some time, and she's not going to stop me. She just doesn't get the implications.

The implications being that we won't see each other for three entire years.

She picks at the guitar strings with her fingers and sings the song that she's playing, "I want to find stars, for us up above. And you know why? It's you I love." She always sings this song; it's her very favourite, and surprisingly, it earns us some spare change for ice creams. But I know she only sings it to me, and it's like a joke between us. More accurately, a joke for her.

But it's not a joke for me because... I do love her. And not in the way she loves me.

It's the kind of love that isn't meant to come between two girls, and the kind of love that's even worse because it's unrequited. In a way, moving so far and for so long will be good. And as much as it makes me sad, maybe I'll get over her once and for all.

She picks up her guitar and starts playing it again, and I snap. Stupid guitar, stupid Deryn, and her stupid, *stupid* oblivious, and eternally happy mind.

"God, Deryn, will you put that damn guitar down for *one* second?" I hiss, and she drops the guitar, flinching and turning her messy blond head to me in that cute way that makes me almost smile. Her face looks so beautiful and filled with concern, and yet she still seems carefree all the while. I feel like shaking her sometimes to make her feel what I'm feeling. Make her feel *something*.

"Jessie, what's wrong?" she wants to know, slipping an arm around my shoulders. One that I quickly shove off, and my heart is already remorseful for it, but my brain and mind are angry and frustrated with her. I can't be mean to her when she's touching me. It would be like kicking a puppy that just brought you the newspaper. Completely and utterly wrong.

"Deryn, tonight I'm going on a plane to another country," I tell her, sitting on my hands so I can resist the urge of shaking her, "and you won't see me again for three years."

"I'll visit you," she says with a shrug, not looking at me. My lips quiver, fighting the tears, and I shake my head at her. She can't visit me. Her parents are poor. She is poor. We're just thirteen-year-old kids without money to go and visit each other across continents, and I also won't have the time up there to come visit her.

"You don't have the money," I say.

"You can come to me," she says, and I already have the answer for that, too.

"I won't have the time," I tell her, feeling bad for telling her that I won't have the time for her. But it's the truth. I won't. "I have classes, and I'll have to study, and then— there won't be time to go because my parents will be busy and stuff..."

She is silent, and she plays with the guitar, picking it up and tightening the strings, rubbing it to make it shiny again.

"Deryn," I say, impatient. I'm only angry at her because it feels like it was the only way to stop me from breaking down in tears in front of her. I didn't want to freak her out like that, but later on, I know I will hate myself for acting like this. I know I will bawl my eyes out in my bedroom because I had to do this. Because we have to part. Forever. And I have to get that through to her somehow.

She turns her head back to me, face expressionless but still with that untroubled aura about her, like it'll all be okay just because she thinks it will. Just because she wants it to be. "I'll wait for you," she tells me, with the sweetest smile on her pink lips.

"Three years, Deryn, you'll wait *three years* for me?" I inquire incredulously. Deryn never lies, but it's not just that; I don't want her to wait for me. It's not fair for me to make her wait. She needs to find some other best friend—find a *boyfriend*. Someone who's not me, because I know I'll never be that girl for her. She doesn't want me that way.

"Yeah," she says with a nod and looks up at me, "I'll wait. I've waited for you before."

"For a week in that stupid summer camp?" I ask in disbelief, crossing my arms. A week isn't that long, especially compared to three years.

She shrugs and grins, looks me in the eyes, unconcerned. Always content and without a care in the world.

"Worst summer vacation of my life," she tells me, tapping her button nose with a wink.

"So what makes you think you can wait three years if you can't even wait one week?" I demand, biting my lip to stop my eyes from misting. It was the worst summer of my life, too. I hated the girls in camp; everything we did was stupid, and I missed her like a fat kid on a diet misses cake. I was supposed to stay a whole three weeks, but I ran to the camp counsellor and cried and cried until she let me go home.

"I can wait. It'll be hard," she pouts, "and I'll miss you," she says solemnly, and I want to hit her because there is no way on Earth she'll miss me as much as I'll miss her. "But I *can* wait," she looks at me, twinkle in her big eyes. "And I *will* wait, Jessie."

A lump rises in my throat, and I swallow a sob. Why does she have to make it so hard for me? I don't want to leave her like this, and she has to go and be all sweet on me.

I have to tell her. I have to tell her not to bother waiting. But the thing is, I don't want her to 'not wait'. I want her to wait. But that's just not fair to ask of her, and it's also completely unrealistic. Things may change in an instant, so how much could change in three years? She will be sixteen, and so will I. It's better to end it all now, while it's still bearable, than to feel guilty afterwards for drifting apart.

I suck in my breath and scrunch up my eyes. "Don't."

"Don't what?" she asks and starts playing her guitar all over again, looking bored.

"Don't wait," I say simply, but the words hurt, and it's going to hurt even more hearing her agree with them. But she has to agree; she just *has* to. It's the only reasonable thing to do.

She looks at me with the guitar in her lap, and she's gawking. "Are you on crack?" she says with a smile, and I frown.

"No, I'm not on crack," I say, standing up and putting my hands on my hips. I can't believe her. Crack! Me? "I'm just trying to be reasonable about this, Deryn; three years is a long time. Let's be reasonable; won't we drift apart?" I ask, glaring at her and my lip twitching, and then answer my own question since she seems unwilling to form her own. "We will. Be reasonable!"

"That's not being reasonable," she says, crossing her arms and shaking her yellow curls. "That's just taking the easy way out."

I suck in my breath again. Okay, so maybe it is. Taking the easy way out, I mean. But when I told Daddy I liked Deryn and didn't want to leave her behind, he said if I really cared about her, I should break up now. He said it would be unfair to make her wait for something that may never happen, even when I told him I wanted her to be my girlfriend. Even though we aren't a couple and never have been, the principle still applies.

Well, you know what," I say, shrugging my shoulders, "I want the easy way out. I don't want us to drift apart, I don't want it to hurt that bad. I *want* it to be easy."

Her expression is stony. "Too bad, because I'm going to wait. Right here," she points to the sidewalk, "at this corner. Forever."

No, you won't," I say bitterly, and kick her leg, lightly but angrily. "You just say things like that to shut me up." Then, in defeat, I fall on my knees beside her, hug her tightly, and plant a quick kiss on her pink, freckled cheek before I turn away and start running home.

"I will, Jessie!" She yells behind me cheerfully. "See you in three years!"

My ass she'll still be sitting there in three years.



Three and a half years later...

"Jessie, what's up?" My boyfriend wants to know, putting down his glass on the table and seeming very angry with me. I look at him, chewing on a piece of nasty garden salad. I hate the stuff, but it's better for me, even though my childhood fantasies of becoming an actress came to nothing. Instead, I decided on getting into college and becoming a social worker. Helping people is the only meaningful work I can see myself doing for the rest of my life.

"What's the matter?" I say, even though I know exactly what the matter is.

"We've been dating for a month, and you barely hold my hand," he spits out incredulously. "We haven't even *kissed*."

I ignore his question and point to his soup, "It's going to get cold."

His name is Robert, and we hit it off during our first semester, and finally, a month ago, he asked me out. I had felt a pang in my heart, and it didn't feel quite right. But there was no point in saying no because of a girl I had a crush on ages ago and who had probably moved on with her life, so I said yes.

He's a great guy, but every time I try to kiss him, I end up kissing him on the cheek instead. It doesn't feel right to kiss him on the lips. But now he's getting frustrated with me, and to tell you the truth, I really don't blame him for it. He probably thinks I don't like him. But I do. Just not enough, and not the way he wants me to. Not enough to kiss him, and not enough to want to hold his hand.

"I don't give a damn about the soup, Jessie," he says exasperatedly. "Why don't you kiss me right now?"

I look at him and swallow, closing my eyes. I feel ill. Oh God, I feel ill. I shouldn't feel ill. I haven't seen Deryn in three and a half years, and I'm still not over her. I know, I know, I should be. But instead, I feel like I need to go to the bathroom.

"Would you excuse me?" I say, and Robert looks at me, his lips apart and his eyes disbelieving. It's just a kiss, they say. It's no big deal, they say. I know it's just a kiss, and I know it's not a big deal. But there's a big difference between *knowing* and *feeling*. I give him a forgive-me-look, "I just need to go to the bathroom."

He sighs and nods, "Go ahead, come right back though," he narrows his eyes, and goes back to eating his soup. I pat his hand and get up. I walk into the bathroom and look at myself in the mirror. Who are you, Jessie?

I blink. The melody coming from outside sounds familiar. I rest my hands on the bathroom sink and listen.

I want to find stars...

This is familiar. I know this song. I *know* this song.

for us up above...

Oh, God. It can't be. Not that. Not now, when I'm trying to get my mind straight.

And you know why?

It's you I love.

I'm crying, and now I'm going to have to walk out and come with an explanation that I know will be just another lie on top of a mountain built from lies. I grab some paper tissue and blow my nose on it, then wipe my tears and walk back out to my table.

"I'm sorry," I say, my eyes all red and bloodshot. I'm sure of it. "But I think we're going to have to break up. I really like you, but not in the way you want me to." I pause and rethink for a moment. "Oh, and tell your friends *you* broke up with *me*, if that's what you want."

He sighs heavily, bringing his hands to his forehead and looking up at me, "Jess..."

"I'm sorry," I say and put the money in the middle of the table for my nasty salad, and leave with a wave over my shoulder and a sorry smile. I don't deserve him. I don't deserve anyone, for that matter.

I think I'll just keep running away.



Five and a quarter years later...

After having finished high school and graduated from college, the initial three-year absence has extended to nine years. As much as we try to plan ahead, life always throws something unexpected our way. Long gone is the little schoolgirl infatuated with her best friend. I hold my notebook and look around. I'm on the job now, social worker Jessie Reynolds, looking to report on the recent spike of homeless people in my old hometown. Jim, my coworker, is with me, and we're asking a few people, trying to find out more about demographics, poverty, and social housing. Also hoping I don't run into an ex-best friend.

I love my work. My work is my life, and ever since I found out that guys just don't do it for me, I've thrown myself into my work, and look where it has gotten me. Working and getting paid and feeling somehow grown up but empty at the same time, as if the vital part of me went missing along the way.

"So, are there any homeless people in town?" I question one of the residents, Mrs. Murphy.

"Oh, I don't know, dear; there may be some of them," she says with a shrug. "Try the corner down there if you want to see them. That's where some of them beg money from tourists."

"Alright, thank you," I say, and start walking in the direction of where she'd pointed. I spot a girl sitting there, her head tipped and her hand around the guitar, her blond curls falling across her eyes, hiding the world around her.

Jim bumps into me when I stop and drop the notebook.

"Reynolds," Jim says, surprised. "What's going on?"

I hear a whisper of the guitar float into my ears, and my heart starts to race. She's sitting there, guitar in her lap, that familiar hair hanging longer than it used to, skin tanned from sitting out in the sun, and her pretty blue eyes... I can't even see them, but I can't help but want to, and at the same time... I *don't* want to.

"Reynolds?" Jim says irritably, and I start walking forward, my feet moving on their own, and my brain mentally cursing at him, threatening to chop him up with a steak knife as soon as we get back to our office. I leave the notebook and files behind me, lying on the street.

I can clearly hear the music now, and it's the same song she used to play, the same one I'd heard in the bathroom where I'd been staring at myself in the mirror. The one that was and is her favourite, and the one she sang and played for me.

She looks up and spots me walking towards her, and she smirks, *"I want to find stars, for us up above. And you know why? It's you I love."*

I still can't believe it. I've heard from people about the girl sitting on this corner. She'd been sitting here for almost nine years, and she was always here; every single day, she was here.

Her expression softens, and she leans her guitar against the wall and stands to her feet, "I've been waiting for you."

Oh, God. I feel tears well up in my eyes and can barely hear Jim's confused questions; all I see is her, standing at the corner, just as she promised she would be. I told her not to wait for me, but has she listened? *No*. She's been waiting all these years for me, and it's breaking my heart.

"You are such an *idiot*," I cry into a palm, looking blurry-eyed at the girl who has been my best friend for so many years, and who I threw mud at, and who I squealed at, and who I laughed with, and who I cried with. I loved her; I *love* her, and I certainly haven't gotten over her.

She's still smiling, though, with that reckless, easygoing way about her. She looks me over. "You've grown taller, Jessie," she says with a shake of her head. "I don't think I can boss you around any longer, you know."

I choke back a sob and a laugh. She's the only one who would say something like that.

There is no easy way, and I've learned that the *hard* way. No matter how hard I've run away from her, I've never quite been able to escape her.

"Look, I made you laugh," she says, stepping a little closer. "That's got to count for something, doesn't it?"

"How could you have waited here for so long? Why didn't you give up?" I sob, wanting to hit her for always being so nice and keeping to her word. It sucks that I love her this much, and it sucks even more because I know she deserves it.

"I'll never give up on you, Jessie," she says with a smile, and I know she's not lying. Because Deryn never lies, and that's why I know she doesn't love me. She told me so back in the fifth grade.

"I want to hit you," I inform her. "This is so unprofessional; I'm supposed to be interviewing you—you *homeless bum*. What have you been doing, sitting out here and letting your hair grow long? What about a job? What about your *life*?"

She smiles at me, half bemusedly and half indignantly. "I recall you liking my hair a little long. More to play with, you said back in fifth grade," she says, giving me an odd sort of smile that sent chills down my spine. "And for the record," she says with a roll of her eyes, "I don't sit out here all day; I take night classes, or took, rather... I'm a graphic designer, sugar."

She always wanted to be an artist. Said she'd paint the world she wants to live in. It's way easier than changing it.

"Still, why wait for *me*? I gave up on you!" I shriek at her, tears spilling down my cheeks.

"Jessie, I stayed because I made a promise to you and..."

"And you have never broken promises, or lied," I say with a sigh.

"Oh hell no, that's not true," she laughs, and I stare. What has she ever lied about?

"Reynolds!" Jim cries out, bemused.

I turn to him and wave him off, mouthing *sorry*. "Can we just catch up for a bit?" I ask.

"We're on the job here, Jess," he says irritably, and then, "Okay, sure, I'll be around..."

I nod, and walk up to the corner, and sit down, sniffing. I look to Deryn, and she sits herself down beside me.

"I need to tell you about something—a big fat lie I told you ages ago that wasn't in the least bit true and still isn't," she tells me, wrapping her arms around her legs and pressing her face into her knees. She appears, for reasons unbeknownst to me and the rest of the world, highly embarrassed.

"They're watching us," I say, pointing across the street where tourists and passersby were looking in our direction, two strange girls sitting on the sidewalk and oblivious to their surroundings.

"I don't care," Deryn says to her knees, and when she looks up, I see her face has turned fire engine red, which is funny because I don't think it's ever gone that colour before in her life. She was a permanently unembarrassed person, but apparently, this has changed.

"Oh my God, is it heat stroke?" I say. I don't know the symptoms of heat stroke, but I can tell when someone is getting hot when their faces turn red.

She ignores my obviously stupid question and starts explaining, "You remember when those girls kept teasing me back in the fifth grade, so I walked up to them and announced that I didn't love you, not one tiny bit in the way they insinuated?"

"Yes," I say, recalling the events with horror. It was a sad day, and I'd gone and eaten three ice creams and swung on the swing until lunchtime, avoiding her. We were back and talking the next day, though, as if nothing had happened.

"Well, that was a lie," she admits, and my heart skips, and then skips again.

My gaze swivels in her direction, and I can't believe she's looking at me so earnestly. No, that couldn't really be true, could it? Why on earth would she fall in love with someone like me? It's impossible; it just doesn't happen in real life. Only in my dreams!

"What?" I splutter, and now my face is flaming flamingo. And before I can say anything else, she's brought me into her arms and is kissing me, her body pressing up against me.

Deryn is kissing me. Deryn, my best friend, who I've never before imagined having feelings for me other than platonic, is kissing me, and now she has her tongue in my mouth. Which, by the way, isn't a very best friend-like thing to do.

I feel giddy and weak, and oh so glad she had waited for me after all. I also don't want it to end because I'm convinced this has to be a dream. She is pressing me down on the sidewalk in front of the public, and tourist cameras, and laughing children. Her lips slide away from mine, and she takes in her breath, her eyes closed, breathing hard and ragged.

"You get it now?"

"I—I think I do," I say into her neck, my eyes rolling back into my head; the tingles were getting that bad. I want my best friend, and she wants me back. "But I lo—love you more," I breathe.

"I missed you, God, I missed you," her tears splash onto my cheek, and she sits with her back up against the building on the corner, wrapping her arms around my waist and pressing me to her, letting my head rest on her chest. "And I didn't want to 'not wait' because I've never wanted anyone else but you, and that's how it stays."

"I went out with someone," I admit to her, "but we barely even held hands, and I wouldn't let him kiss me; you're my first kiss. My first *everything*."

"Not everything... yet..." she corrects, takes her guitar into her hands, and starts playing her favourite song to me.

I close my eyes and listen, relaxing, until she stops for a moment.

"This was always for you, you know," she reveals. "I'll still want you bad when I'm an old woman with grey hair and a walking stick."

I couldn't help but grin giddily to myself.

"So, will you still need me? Will you still feed me, when I'm eighty-four?"

"Oh yes," I say, tilting my head and pucker my lips, "and you?"

"I can make you pancakes tomorrow morning." She bends her head down to capture my lips, and we kiss for a while. "And I'll need you in my life for eternity because I bet you'll make the hottest old lady ever," she proclaims before returning to playing her guitar, and I cry from happiness in her lap.

The End